

# Chapter 35: Rhys

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As anticipated, Prince Nikolai and Sabrina's wedding was nothing short of chaos. Roads were blocked off, helicopters hovered overhead capturing aerial footage of the grand procession, and the streets were packed with eager onlookers hoping to catch a glimpse of the fairytale come to life. Reporters from around the world clamored to cover every detail, from Sabrina's wedding dress train to the glamorous guest list. Only a select few journalists from Eldorra's national media were permitted inside the ceremony, while others scrambled to find a prime spot outside the church.

Bridget spent the day performing the typical duties of a bridesmaid. While the other bridesmaids prepared in the bridal suite, I stood by with Sabrina's bodyguard, Joseph. As an American contractor, Joseph was the substitute for Nikolai's usual Royal Guard, following his abdication. While he rambled about his previous client's exploits—unprofessional, but not my concern—I stayed alert, scanning the surroundings. With a big day like this, anything could go wrong.

Fortunately, everything remained calm, and before long, Sabrina emerged, radiant in her white gown and veil. The bridesmaids followed, with Bridget bringing up the rear. She wore the same pale green dress as the others, but there was something about her that made her stand out. My gaze drifted to the way the fabric hugged her curves before I forced myself to look up to her face, where my breath caught in my throat.

I could hardly believe she was real.

Bridget flashed me a secretive smile as she walked by, her eyes appraising my suit. "You clean up nice, Mr. Larsen," she whispered.

“So do you,” I replied, matching her pace as I leaned in closer. “Can’t wait to tear that dress off you later, princess.”

She didn’t reply, but the faint blush on her cheeks told me everything.

However, my mood shifted when we entered the wedding hall and I saw Steffan Holstein sitting in one of the front pews. His perfectly polished shoes and coiffed hair caught my attention, but it was the way he looked at Bridget that stirred something dark inside me. If he didn’t stop staring at her, I was going to have to take action.

I tried to focus on the ceremony, but the image of Steffan eyeing Bridget relentlessly made my blood boil. Murdering a high-ranking guest during a royal wedding wasn't ideal, so I forced myself to control my thoughts.

Bridget took her place at the altar while I stayed hidden in the shadows. As Nikolai and Sabrina exchanged vows, I caught Bridget’s eye. She smiled at me—a subtle, almost imperceptible smile—just for me. It was a brief, stolen moment amid hundreds of people, and it was ours.

After the ceremony, we headed to the ballroom for the grand reception. Later, the second, more intimate reception would be held at Tolose House, Nikolai and Sabrina's new residence, a short walk from the palace. Only 200 family members and close friends were invited, no press allowed.

But it was there, at the second reception, where I had to watch Bridget dance with Steffan. His hand rested on her lower back, and she smiled at something he said. The jealousy clawed at me, relentless and bitter.

“They make a nice-looking couple,” Joseph commented, following my gaze. “The princess and the duke. Fairytale stuff.” He laughed. “Too bad she’d never go for an average Joe like you or me, huh?”

“Be careful what you say next.” My voice was cold, lethal. “Or it’ll be the last thing you say.”

Joseph must have known the danger in my words, because he fell silent, taking a small step back. “It was a joke,” he muttered, clearly intimidated. “Take your job a bit too seriously, don’t you?”

“Show some respect. That’s the crown princess,” I retorted. He wasn’t worthy of even scraping the dirt off her shoes.

How had Sabrina ended up with Joseph as her bodyguard? The man had zero social tact, and that was coming from me, someone who couldn't care less about social niceties.



Summaryer

Joseph wisely kept quiet, though his surly expression said it all. I had bigger concerns to deal with.

Steffan and Bridget remained on the dance floor as the song changed, and though I knew it was out of obligation, it still hurt to watch them together. They made a perfect pair—Bridget, regal and angelic, and Steffan, debonair and clean-cut in his tuxedo.

Then there was me—tattooed, scarred, and haunted by the things I’d done.

By all accounts, Steffan was the better and easier option for Bridget. Her family, the palace, and the press all wanted the Princess and the Duke love story.

But I didn’t give a damn.

Bridget was mine. She wasn’t mine to take, but I was taking her anyway—every laugh, every joy, every fear, every inch of her body, and every beat of her heart. All mine.

And I couldn’t take watching her dance with another man any longer.

I left my post and made my way across the dance floor, ignoring Joseph’s protests. I was breaking every rule of protocol, but most of the guests were too drunk to notice me. I was an employee, barely beneath their notice, and in that moment, it worked in my favor.

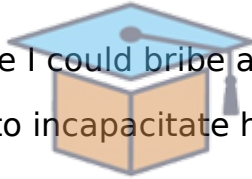
“Your Highness,” I said, my voice dark. “Sorry to interrupt, but Jules called. There’s an emergency.”

I was holding Bridget’s phone while she danced, so the excuse made sense.

Alarm crossed her face. “Oh, no. It must be serious. She never calls for emergencies.” She looked at Steffan. “Would you mind terribly if I—”

“Of course not,” he replied, unbothered. “Please, take the call. I’ll be here.”

I bet you will. Maybe I could bribe a server to slip something into his drink—nothing lethal, but enough to incapacitate him for the rest of the night.



I handed Bridget her phone to keep up the ruse as we exited the reception room.

But as we stepped into the hallway, I said, “Jules didn’t call.”

“What?” Bridget’s brow furrowed in confusion. “Then why did you—”

“He was getting too close.” My teeth clenched, and my jaw ached.

A beat passed, and Bridget’s face cleared. She glanced around before whispering, “You know I had to dance with him.”

“You danced with him twice.”

“Rhys, he’s technically my date.”

It was the wrong thing to say, and judging by the way Bridget winced, she knew it.

I stopped in front of the library, a place I’d scouted earlier. “Get in,” I said curtly.

Bridget swallowed hard, but she obeyed without hesitation.

I followed her inside and locked the door behind us with a soft click. The room was mostly empty, with only a rug, a table, and a large mirror. The lights were off, but moonlight filtered through the curtains, casting enough light for me to see Bridget’s wary expression.